"The All-Encompassing Russian Soul":
Universal Destiny and the Russian Spirit in Dostoevsky's Pushkin Speech

In his 1880 speech at the unveiling of the Pushkin monument, Dostoevsky addressed his audience with great ardour about Russia's "pan-European" and "universal" destiny as foreshadowed by Pushkin (66). The moral and transcendental language of the speech calls for reconciliation between opposing sides – between Europe and Russia, Westernizers and Slavophiles – for a cosmopolitan utopia fused with romantic nationalism. Instead of concerning itself with imperial expansionism, his message focuses on a destiny driven by a deep sense of moral duty and religious mission.

According to Dostoevsky, Russia's destiny is "universality, won not by the sword but by the power of brotherhood and our brotherly aspiration for the reunion of all men"(66). The idea is largely, if not entirely, a moral one; Dostoevsky distinguishes Russia's expansionist destiny from European conquest driven by greed. It is precisely because of its uniquely all-encompassing character that Russia has the capacity for "universal responsiveness", and, consequently, bears a moral imperative to serve all humanity. In this messianic interpretation of Russia's history and future, even its foreign policies are viewed as benefiting other nations rather than pursuing nationalist self-interest (a view solely based on his assumption that Russian statesmen "have [not] been inept") (66). While this belief could be seen as supporting imperial expansionism through its disregard for other nations' sovereignty and its promotion of unity under Russian leadership, Dostoevsky's moral philosophy appears to drive his geopolitical position rather than merely justifying it. Throughout the speech (as in his broader work), Dostoevsky addresses the suffering of the "uprooted drifter"[1] – the westernised Russian intellectual – and demands his audience to reflect on questions of salvation and universal happiness. His providential perspective also extends beyond Russia to all nations in his remark of each people having "its yearning after its appointed end". In this way, his vision remains primarily metaphysical and guided by spiritual and philosophical concerns.

Pushkin's life and work is employed symbolically in the speech as a unifying force that aims to overcome all division and fragmentation in the nation. This reveals the fundamental concern of both the author and his era: establishing a unified national identity during a period of crisis and social transition. In Pushkin, Dostoevsky sees an ability to inhabit the perspectives of other cultures – a "capacity for universal sympathy". By elevating the figure of the national poet as the embodiment of the Russian spirit, Dostoevsky thus extends this universal responsiveness to all Russian people. The claim that Pushkin "alone of all world poets" possessed this capacity reflects the nation's urgent need for self-definition in response to its sense of alienation and cultural inferiority to Europe. The duality of Russia's geographical and cultural position between

[1] Quotations without page number citations are from the website source of the full text of the speech (see *Works Cited*).

Europe and Asia, at once its predicament, perhaps also provides it with the foundation to synthesise both influences and assume diverse cultural identities.

More importantly, in Dostoevsky's view, suffering is intimately connected with a deep understanding of humanity's struggles. Therefore, Russia's history of suffering grants the nation a profound, universal empathy and a unique spiritual ethos that allows it to speak to universal human experiences. He sees the "pure, Russian soul" embodied in Tatyana from Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, who "expresses the truths of the poem" and represents "the apotheosis of the Russian woman". Her spiritual beauty is reflected in her sacrifice ("Let me, let me alone be deprived of happiness") and in the "unshakable and indestructible" foundation of her soul that stems from her "pure and humble life". In contrast, westernized Russians like Onegin, who feel they belong neither in Russia nor in Europe, are portrayed as cut off from their people and soil. Yet rooted in the soul of the simple, suffering people is the bridge to universal aspirations for unity and brotherhood. Dostoevsky believes that to be truly Russian is to be "brother to all men, to become a *universal man*" (66). Drawing from Russian Orthodox values that emphasise the collective and the universal (as he speaks of Christ "traversed this wretched land in the garb of a slave and blessed it"), Dostoevsky envisions Russia's national destiny similarly as its eventual union of all people, a pure, selfless deed performed out of "brotherly love" (66).

Ultimately, the Pushkin speech reveals more Pushkin's significance as an enduring symbol than his specific contributions to world literature. He is a cultural symbol that can be used to foster a sense of national pride and bridge ideological divides within Russian society. Dostoevsky sees in Pushkin the proof of Russia's providential role that transcends narrow nationalism and articulates truths applicable to all. In his view, Russia's particular, all-human responsiveness – rooted in the nation's historical suffering and spiritual character, and exemplified by its national poet – becomes the very mechanism through which universality can be achieved.

Works Cited

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